

BEACH BUZZ

Winter 2002

Volume 3, Number 4

a publication of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation and its Chapters
view more Beach Buzz articles online by clicking here

"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

Caliente Nudist Resort Begins to Bustle *Seven years into the making, the pools are filling up, and the tennis courts are booked.*

By James Thorner

Staff Writer, St. Petersburg Times

December 1, 2002 – LAND O'LAKES

On the day before Thanksgiving, four nudists basted themselves in the sun beside a 90-degree heated swimming pool.

A woman and a man – she in the buff, he inexplicably wearing black trousers – plunked tennis balls on a nearby clay court.

"On the weekends, all six tennis courts are full," beams Chuck Foster, president of Caliente nudist resort in Land O'Lakes.

Foster's pride is justified. Nearly seven years after it broke ground on the east side of U.S. 41, Caliente is becoming the Spanish-style nudist playground its supporters always dreamed it would be.

For Land O'Lakes, known as the nudism capital of the United States, it's the fifth bare-skinned resort.

About six weeks ago, Caliente's three swimming pools filled with bathers for the first time. Two are for volleyball. The other is called a "conversation pool" and is meant for socializing.

A couple weeks after that, the resort's octagonal-shaped lakeside "Mediterranean Beach Bar" opened with four beers on tap and a variety of bottled beverages.

The beach itself, due next year, will

occupy the lakeshore in back of the bar and conversation pool.

"We'll clean up the beach and bring in white Panama City sand," Foster said as he looked over his work in progress.

Even more encouraging from the perspective of Foster and his two business partners, the first of the resort's 132 condominiums, trimmed in mock-Mediterranean architectural ornament, got the okay of building inspectors last week.

The first residents are already lugging boxes and furniture into their one- and two-bedroom units.

People have also moved into several of what the resort calls Casitas – mobile homes adorned with stucco, porches and Spanish roof tile. The casita clubhouse, bordered by a columned arcade, has been up since summer.

"We've already had two weddings here," Foster said as he breezed by the clubhouse in a golf cart.

In a business still dominated by mom-and-pop campgrounds, Caliente, with plans for 350 homes and a 40-room motel, will be among the most upscale nudist resorts in North America. It was a long time coming.

Foster and others struggled for years to rustle up financing, finding a savior in Lutz health products millionaire Carl Anderson. Many doubted that the walled

resort would ever rise from the 100 acres.

As the first tourists started arriving at Caliente a few weeks ago, all the frustrations appeared forgotten. Even Paradise Lakes nudist resort, Caliente's inspiration and soon-to-be competitor, hung a congratulatory banner outside walls at U.S. 41 and Carriker Road.

The biggest expansion comes next year. Already, the concrete-block walls of future town homes rise from the sand across from Caliente's office building.

Owners recently bought an additional 24 acres, outside the resort's walls, from the Blankenship family. The land will probably become part of the resort's RV park.

Most important for future tourist traffic is construction of the 25,000-square-foot-plus clubhouse. It will feature a sports bar, piano bar, restaurant, health spa, locker room, dance floor and 85-seat dining room.

A nearby Galleria will lease space to businesses such as mini-mart, a jewelry store, a masseuse, a clothing store and a branch of Serendipity Accents & Gifts, a business based on Davis Island in Tampa.

James Thorner covers Pasco County growth and development. He can be reached at (813) 909-4613 or toll free 1-800-333-7505, ext. 4613. His e-mail address is thorner@sptimes.com. ✪